



Two love birds



18 0 1

Chapter 1 by Shae

The spring I turned fourteen was all about Tucker Andrews. No, it was about Missy Wood. No, Meghan Stone.

It was about all three and probably a few other girls I've forgotten. The spring you turn fourteen is a little heady, crush-wise.

I was four years into life at a private boy's school in my hometown of Richmond, Virginia. A handsome, compact campus of brick buildings and immaculate playing fields. Rigorous dress code. Chapel every morning. Parking lots filled with Saabs and Jeep Cherokees. Thanks to a few good teachers, the institution had a decent academic reputation—nothing spectacular. It felt more like a finishing school for the sons of Richmond stockbrokers than a place that aimed to fill you with ambition.

Both my parents came from old Richmond families. My dad actually was a stockbroker, so it wasn't like I was an alien species, but I felt more than a little out of place. I lived in the wrong neighborhood—the leafy, semi-integrated north side of town. I'd attended public school until fifth grade, which wasn't much of a disadvantage. It could have even given me a tough-kid sheen

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lacrosse stick to save my life, and we weren't members of the country club, where all the relevant after-school commingling occurred. I was slightly bookish and earnest. I loved that R.E.M. song "You Are the Everything," and wrote the lyrics in a notebook, which would be deadly if discovered.

There was a sister school up the street, an all-girls campus that projected the purity and mystery of a convent. It had a considerably better academic reputation, especially in languages and humanities, so grade-A kids like me routinely trekked there midday to take, like, Latin or French.

The sister school also had an impressive drama program where sensitive boys were more or less at home. Legitimately cool girls dabbled in theater, too. Popular boys certainly did not, but there was a class of pretty ponytailed Outback Red-wearing young female that thought giving acting a whirl before graduation sounded kind of okay.

Which was how I met Tucker Andrews. A senior. Irrefutably popular. Tall, preppy bangs, raspy voice, possessed of a kind of sporty, tomboyish good humor that entranced me. She was directing a one-act play called Kissing Scene and picked me to play the lead. I still remember riding around in Tucker's wood-paneled Plymouth station wagon, studying the script, listening to her talk about how great it was going to be, how much fun we were going to have. In carpool the next afternoon, I told my closest friend, Alex, that I was in love with her, and he was so confused and embarrassed for me that he didn't know where to look.

Kissing Scene by Carl Martin. A play-within-a-play about a boy and a girl rehearsing a kissing scene for an acting class—with all of the awkward humor and sublimated attraction that scenario suggests. Tucker cast Missy Wood in the opposing role. Missy was a new girl, a boarder from out-of-state (the girls' school had a small population of boarders who lived in a dormitory on the third floor of the main building). I remember Tucker saying something to Missy before the first rehearsal along the lines of: "Poor Taylor. He's maybe never kissed a girl before."

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The first rehearsal Missy said she had a cold sore and couldn't kiss me. The second, she sort of did—resolutely closed mouthed and full of hesitation and embarrassment. Third rehearsal, she quit the play. Which would have been mortifying, but hale-hearted Tucker, who shone more brightly than Missy to me anyway, said not to worry. She had a replacement in mind.

Meghan Stone. Curly blonde hair. Big laugh. Radiant smile—the sort of girl that instantly puts you at ease. She and Tucker were from the same crowd—they went to the same parties, dated the same athletes. And she shared some of Tucker's up-for-anything savoir faire. To her, the play was a lark. It was hilarious that her colead was fourteen. She spoke the lines, delivered the jokes, and kissed me with unmistakable enthusiasm. That's how I remember it—her kissing me. I had no experience to draw upon, was unsure of what I was doing, and flubbed my form a couple of times. ("Taylor, you don't need to, like, pucker up," Tucker said from her director's chair.) Meghan wore pegged stonewashed jeans and chunky sweaters. Blue eyes. She smoked Camel Lights, as did Tucker, as did Missy. All three of these girls—all the girls I remember from this period of my life—smelled like cigarette smoke up close.

Meghan and I didn't remotely date. She had an on-again, off-again boyfriend. But we did hang out a little. After rehearsal. Without Tucker. We'd pile into her teal VW Beetle (license plate: MEGSTER), she'd pull a Camel Light out of her pack and just sort of drive us around. This was 1988, but the car had to be at least a decade old: crank windows, rusted running board, an 8-track player in the dash. The only eight-track she had was The Steve Miller Band's Greatest Hits. Here is an absolutely indelible memory from that spring: riding in MEGSTER, windows open, listening to "Dance, Dance, Dance" on tinny speakers, thinking I might get to kiss Meghan one more time.

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